



Terroir as a Concept to Improve Human Health

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Soil is important to human health because of the ability of healthy soils to supply nutrients through food products, medications derived from soil, its ability to clean water, and for many other positive reasons. On the other hand, degraded soils can have negative impacts on human health through processes such as dust generation and by acting as a point of human contact with heavy metals, organic chemicals, and pathogens. Despite the definite links between soil and human health, it is likely that most people don't think about soil when considering human health issues. In fact, there appears to be a disconnect between most people in our modern society and soil, and when people do notice soil it often seems to be in a negative context, leading to terms such as "soiled", "dirty", "dirt poor", etc. People pay attention to and care for things that matter to them, and creating a more positive public image of soil has the possibility of improving human health by leading to careful and caring treatment of the soil resource. The concept of terroir is a good example of a setting within which soils have a more positive image. While terroir originally established a connection between those who love wine and the soils that produce those wines, the concept has been expanded to many additional products such as cacao, cheese, coffee, fruits, olive oil, and vegetables. If the terroir concept could be expanded to include additional products that are important to people and expanded into parts of the world where it is not currently well known, that may provide an increased positive perception of soil, and thereby indirectly improve human health. It may even be possible to provide a terroir link to direct health benefits, such as medications derived from a given soil environment, and therefore provide a very focused emphasis on soil and human health issues. Therefore, we advocate a concerted effort to expand the terroir concept as a means to improve overall human health.